

# Kentucky Teacher

August 2009

News for the Nation's Most Innovative Educators

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## Teacher uses sewing to overcome 'tears'

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# Kentucky Teacher

News for the Nation's Most Innovative Educators

Interim Commissioner of Education  
**KEVIN NOLAND**

Director, Division of Communications  
**LISA GROSS**

Editor  
**STEPHANIE SIRIA**

Staff Writers  
**SUSAN RIDDELL**  
**MATTHEW TUNGATE**

Graphic Designer  
**JOHN BOONE**

Photographer  
**AMY WALLOT**

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**Front cover:** Mary Ludwig helps junior Paige Ladd with a back stitch during Ludwig's Fashion 1 class at Georgia Chaffee Westport Teenage Parent Program (TAPP) (Jefferson County) on April 8. Photo by Amy Wallot

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Standards Board  
100 Airport Road, 3rd Floor  
Frankfort, KY 40601  
Phone: (502) 564-4606  
Fax: (502) 564-7080  
Toll Free: (888) 598-7667  
[www.kyepsb.net](http://www.kyepsb.net)

### About Retirement

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Retirement System  
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Frankfort, KY 40601-3868  
Phone: (502) 848-8500  
Fax: (502) 573-0199  
Toll Free: (800) 618-1687  
<http://ktrs.ky.gov>

# KAC grants support reading in Kentucky schools

Hoping to replicate the success it has seen with the Clay County Reading Celebration, the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) has awarded four other school districts grants to promote reading in their communities. Fulton Independent, Marion County, Estill County and Powell County school districts used the Reading Celebration grants to partner with their respective communities to create events that bring families and schools together to celebrate reading.

The grants of \$5,000 each were made possible through support from the National Endowment for the Arts Challenge America program.

Clay County was awarded \$3,000 to conduct workshops and training for other school district grantees and to assist the KAC in developing a Reading Celebration Manual as a model for schools across the nation that would like to emulate such a program.

The Clay County Reading Celebration, begun in 1998 by a citizen's group, is for all elementary schools in the county and involves the entire community. The celebration annually transforms an entire school into a fantasyland, attracts dozens of authors, provides plenty of fun snacks and gives away free books to entice children into the

world of literature. Over all academic scores of the Clay County elementary students have risen since the event began, and, at the May 22 celebration, 1,028 students met their accelerated reading goals. *See page 6 for more on the 2009 Clay County Reading Celebration.*

Marion County was the first of the grantees to have its celebration in October 2008. "For those who thought reading was boring, the reading celebration certainly turned that thought around and gave parents ideas about how they can make reading fun for their own children," said Diane Evans, instructional supervisor for the Marion County school district.

Powell County's reading celebration, "Journey Through the Arts," held on March 28, was an evening filled with student performances involving music, storytelling, drama, media and folk art productions at Bowen Elementary School. The celebration included projects led by Yolantha Pace, Octavia Sexton and Susan Mullins, who are artists from KAC's Arts Education Roster.

Fulton Independent's celebration, "Holiday of Books," was held on May 8 at Carr Elementary School, with theme rooms decorated for major holidays of the year and related books. "We had a tremendous turnout," said Fulton Independent Superintendent Dianne Owen. "I thought it was one of the best things we did all year. It really showed how much fun reading can be."

The Estill County Reading Celebration, "Oh, the Places You'll Go With Reading," was held on May 22 at Estill Springs Elementary School, with more than 2,500 in attendance, including Kentucky First Lady Jane Beshear. Each storybook theme room was sponsored by a local business, organization or agency that provided decorations and food and helped with activities. "The outstanding thing about our celebration was the community collaboration," said Community Education Director Teresa Dawes. "Our sponsors really helped contribute to the success of the event."

The KAC's Reading Celebration Manual will be available online at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year.

**MORE INFO...**

[www.artscouncil.ky.gov](http://www.artscouncil.ky.gov)



Photo by Amy Wallot

## Business show-and-tell

*Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) middle school language arts teacher Ann Arnold, right, asks a question to Newspapers in Education coordinator Candi Campbell, far left, during a presentation at The Advocate-Messenger during the 2009 Teacher Academy sponsored by the Danville-Boyle County Chamber of Commerce in June. Teachers from Boyle County, Danville Independent, Garrard County and Lincoln County school districts and KSD visited area businesses and saw real-world examples of how the subjects they teach are applied in the day-to-day execution of various jobs.*

# Kentucky hosts statewide dropout-prevention summit

The costs of dropping out of high school are shouldered not only by the individual dropout, but also by the communities in which they live and by society as a whole. For instance, high school dropouts are four times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed. They earn much less than those with diplomas, and one in four resorts to public assistance.

Although Kentucky's current high school graduation rate of 84.5 percent is above the national average, 6,489 students in our state dropped out in 2008. And almost 26 percent of adults in Kentucky have less than a high school education.

These numbers have real consequences: On average, Kentucky high school dropouts earn about \$6,800 less each year than some-

one with a diploma; dropouts typically have worse health and often do not live as long as those who have completed high school; and crime rates soar among those who have dropped out of school. Reducing our dropout rate is critical to not only educational achievement but also workforce development, economic development and the ability of Kentucky to offer its citizens the quality of life they deserve.

On Sept. 11-12, Kentuckians will come together in Frankfort to participate in Graduate Kentucky: A Community Approach. An initiative of First Lady Jane Beshear, this is a comprehensive statewide conversation concerning the state dropout crisis. The goal is not only to understand why students contemplate dropping out of school, but also to

share ideas and best practices on how communities can play a pivotal role in reducing the dropout rate and creating a strategic vision for keeping our children and families engaged in school.

Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of The Children's Defense Fund, will be the keynote speaker on the evening of Sept. 11. Other activities include a conversation with Gov. Steve Beshear and other state and education leaders, a student panel and breakout sessions on best practices.

**MORE INFO...**

[www.graduate.ky.gov](http://www.graduate.ky.gov)

Colmon Elridge or Kate Wood, (502) 564-2611



## COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

By Kevin Noland, Interim Commissioner of Education

# Reliable assessment, accountability begin with curriculum standards

I certainly was not expecting to be writing a column for *Kentucky Teacher* this school year, but I am glad to be back in the education arena, if only temporarily. At its retreat in May, the Kentucky Board of Education asked me to serve as interim education commissioner during the time between the departure of former Interim Education Commissioner Elaine Farris and the selection of a permanent commissioner. At its special meeting on July 17, the board selected Terry Holliday, Ed.D to be Kentucky's fifth commissioner of education. Please see page 4 for more information about Dr. Holliday.



Noland

Many challenges have faced our schools and students this past school year. It's easy to get lost in the maze of funding, budgets, special programs and other attention-getting issues that surround the process of teaching and learning. However, we at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) continue in the belief that our educational progress relies on a strong, valid and reliable system of assessment and accountability.

As a result of Senate Bill 1, which was passed by the Kentucky General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Beshear in April, KDE is taking a hard look at the curriculum standards that are currently in place for students. In June, Gov. Beshear and KDE entered into an agreement with other states to participate in an initiative that will lead to common core standards in the areas of mathematics and English/language arts for P-12 education.

Kentucky joins with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors' Association (NGA) in the project, which brings 49 states and territories together to develop a set of academic standards that will increase rigor and relevance and prepare all students for success after high school.

The standards will be:

- fewer, higher and clearer
- aligned with college and work expectations
- include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking
- skills
- internationally benchmarked, so that students are prepared to succeed in the global
- economy and society
- evidence- and/or research-based

CCSSO and NGA will bring together experts in the field and state partners to determine the basic core components, using

relevant work from the American Diploma Project, ACT, the College Board and others. A national validation committee will be formed to sign off on end-of-course expectations, lead the development of standards, certify state adoption of the common core and more.

The process for standard setting will include opportunities for Kentucky teachers to react and to offer changes to the draft core components. States' adoption of the standards is voluntary, but those states involved in the project have indicated that they are willing to adopt. States will review and give feedback as the project progresses. Grade-by-grade break-outs of the common core standards are expected to be released in December.

### Facing a budget shortfall

Earlier this summer, Gov. Beshear met with members of the Kentucky Board of Education and KDE staff to present his proposal to address a state funding shortfall of nearly one billion dollars. Gov. Beshear summarized his plan by saying that it "seeks to preserve critical areas" of funding for public schools.

As this issue went to print, KDE received a request from the Office of the State Budget Director for descriptions of the impacts of 3 and 4 percent cuts to P-12 funding. However, these cuts exempt SEEK funding, which is the bulk of the state's public school monies. Given the condition of Kentucky's budget, this reduction is relatively small. In the proposal, for 2010, districts are guaranteed the same amount of per-pupil support under SEEK as in 2009. For fiscal year 2009, the base SEEK per-pupil amount is \$3,866. The Governor's proposed revised SEEK state appropriation for fiscal year 2009-10 accommodates a projected increase in average daily attendance. However, it is possible that there will be excess SEEK funds from the revised appropriation. If this is the case, it is proposed that these funds will be distributed back to school districts through the SEEK formula by increasing the base per-pupil amount. In the proposals, there will not be fewer SEEK appropriation dollars expended in fiscal year 2009-10 than in fiscal year 2008-09. In addition, the proposal provides that teachers will receive a one percent salary increase that will come from local school district funds.

KDE staff is beginning work to determine how these reductions will impact the remainder of the state's P-12 education budget. As in past reduction plans, we'll look at Flexible

Focus Funds, which include extended school services, professional development, safe schools, preschool and textbooks. Although the Flexible Focus Funds have taken the hit in earlier budget reductions, these funds do provide flexibility for school districts to target funds where they are most needed.

In addition, Gov. Beshear's proposal taps into more than \$700 million of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. This will not impact the additional allocations under IDEA-B and Title I that districts are scheduled to receive, but districts may be able to use some of these funds, within allowable parameters, to offset any cuts to other programs. The chief federal pot of money that will be used to offset the shortfall is the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

Gov. Beshear's plan uses 55 percent of these funds in Fiscal Year '10 and puts aside 45 percent to help balance Fiscal Year '11. In Fiscal Year '10, the bulk of these stimulus funds will be used to enable school districts to preserve their current education programming. Primarily, they will be used to ensure

that the state guarantees the same amount of financial resources per student on general classroom expenses as we're providing now.

Gov. Beshear said that his plan seeks to preserve critical areas of funding, and he reiterated his administration's strong support for P-12 education. We are fortunate to have funds from the ARRA to offset at least part of the state's shortfall. Without those funds, state agencies and school districts could have been required to make much deeper cuts.

There is no doubt that any cuts will be a burden on school districts, but the Kentucky Board of Education and KDE will provide school personnel with guidance and resources to help weather the storm. The board and the KDE staff are committed to ensuring that all of our students receive high-quality learning experiences.

Although budget cuts will cause us to carefully scrutinize and perhaps even change some of our plans, it won't stop the dedication that we all have to ensuring that all of our students receive high-quality learning experiences.

(Contact Interim Commissioner Noland on this topic at [kevin.noland@education.ky.gov](mailto:kevin.noland@education.ky.gov).)



Photo by Amy Wallot

## Photographic interviews

Bryan Station Middle School (Fayette County) ESL teacher Gayle Hutcherson talks with Leestown Middle School 8th-grade student Jose Nino, right, at the Village Branch of the Lexington Public Library June 17. Also pictured are Leestown Middle 8th-grade student Jimmy Ramirez and Bryan Station High School 9th-grade student Abigail Jaimes. This summer, middle school students participated in a photography program where they interviewed teachers and then used photographic techniques to literally or abstractly document the teachers' answers. Selected photos will be exhibited in La Voz de Kentucky and in a special exhibition created by the students. The Kentucky Department of Education, Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Lexington Public Library, La Voz de Kentucky and Fayette County school district sponsored the program.



# New commissioner to start job in August

## Matthew Tungate

matthew.tungate@education.ky.gov

Kentucky's new commissioner of education will be on the job before most schools open around the state.

The state Board of Education unanimously chose North Carolina educator Terry Holliday as Kentucky's fifth commissioner of education during a special meeting July 17. His first day will be Aug. 5.

Kentucky's new commissioner is a strong leader who believes in collaboration and communication with parents, educators, community leaders, businesspeople and elected officials, and he has a track record of raising student achievement levels, according to board

Chairman Joe Brothers.

"These are challenging times for P-12 education, with budget cuts and enhanced state and federal mandates," Brothers said. "But, I and the other board members are confident that he will provide the guidance needed as Kentucky moves forward."

Holliday, 58, will sign a four-year contract worth \$225,000 annually.

Holliday has served as superintendent of the more than 20,000-student Iredell-Statesville school district since 2002. He also



Holliday

has been an associate superintendent and director of accountability; a high school principal, assistant principal and director of instrumental music; and a junior and senior high school band director. He earned a bachelor's degree from Furman University; a master's degree and doctorate from Winthrop University; and a doctorate from the University of South Carolina.

Holliday and his wife, Denise, are the parents of two college-age

children, Adam and Eleanor (Ellie).

The Kentucky Board of Education narrowed the list of candidates for commissioner from more than 80 applicants to four finalists. Former Commissioner Jon E. Draud resigned for health reasons in December 2008.

At its regular meeting in June, the board took the following actions:

- changed regulations about how daily attendance is calculated
- heard reports from school districts in Jefferson, Christian and Union counties and Covington Independent school district related to school improvement and student achievement

- approved the 2010 Kentucky Minimum Specifications for School Buses
- approved preschool program per-child funding rates for 2009-10
- approved the appointment of Gene Norris, of Georgetown, as a member of the Kentucky High School Athletics Association Board of Control
- reviewed the 2010-2012 budget process
- reviewed School Health Services
- discussed the Extended School Services program

## MORE INFO ...

[www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=KBOE](http://www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=KBOE)

## KERA raised education's importance in state, new board member believes

To give educators throughout the state the opportunity to learn more about the men and women who serve on the state board, *Kentucky Teacher* runs a series of question-and-answer sessions with newly appointed board members.

Gov. Steve Beshear named David Karem, former state senator and current president of the Waterfront Development Corporation, as the newest member of the Kentucky Board of Education in April. Karem replaces Stephen Neal, whose nomination was not approved by the state Senate. Karem's term expires April 14, 2012.

Karem, of Louisville, was a member of the Kentucky General Assembly from 1972 until 2004. Widely recognized as a chief author of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), during his legislative career, Karem also served as a member the Senate Education Committee, the Education Reform Task Force and chair of the Legislative Advisory Council of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). He also served as treasurer of the SREB and is a member of the Partnership for Kentucky Schools. Karem also was instrumental in passing legislation

that reformed the statewide school accountability tests.

Karem is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and the University of Louisville School of Law, and he serves on numerous boards and commissions, including the Spalding University Board of Trustees; Board of Directors of the Louisville Fund for the Arts; and chairman of the education advisory committee for the Louisville Science Center.

Karem and his wife, Anne, reside in Louisville and are the parents of two children, both of whom attended schools in the Jefferson County district from grade school through graduation.

### How are the needs in education today, in the wake of Senate Bill 1, similar to 1990, at the dawn of the KERA?

Frankly, I see the needs in education today to be exactly the same as all of the aspects that brought about the court decision in the Rose case (*Rose v. Council for Better Education*, which forced state legislators to enact KERA).

### Where is education in Kentucky headed?

I feel very positive about the direction of education in Kentucky,

because ever since the passage of KERA, there has been a significant and continuing interest in education by state leadership, as well as our residents. Even in areas of disagreement, the goal always seems to be improvement.

### Why is what you do as a board member important to students today?

The single most important thing that state government can do is provide for a high-quality system of common schools for its people. The Kentucky Board of Education has a fiduciary responsibility to see that mission carried out.

### Other than more money, what do Kentucky schools need most?

I would say it is parental involvement.

### What long-term goals do you have as a member of the board?

My primary goal is the hiring of a top-quality commissioner of education, with the understanding that the Kentucky Board of Education supports and energizes that individual.



Photo by Amy Wallot

Franklin County Circuit Judge Phillip Shepherd swears in new Kentucky Board of Education member David Karem at Berry Hill Mansion in Frankfort on May 12. Gov. Steve Beshear appointed Karem to the board in April. Karem is a former state senator and current president of the Waterfront Development Corporation in Louisville.

### What are the biggest obstacles facing Kentucky children?

Personal family economic challenges, lack of interest from parents and inadequate public financial resources are among the largest.

### What impact do you hope to bring to the board in the immediate future?

I hope I bring a historic perspective, specifically on KERA, as I served in the legislature during its passage.

### Who was your favorite teacher and why?

My favorite teacher was Mrs. Warner, professor of history at the University of Cincinnati, where I received my undergraduate

degree. Mrs. Warner was regularly voted as the most popular teacher at the university. No one willingly missed her lectures, and she always made every word interesting and compelling.

### If you could pick the brain of another person, past or present, who would it be?

There is no question that if I could pick the brain of another person, it would be my father. He was one of the brightest individuals I ever met. He died when I was in my 20s, just at the time we were beginning to really discover one another. He taught me that no day should ever be wasted and that every day should be a learning experience.



# Science fair with agriculture flavor grows projects out of the classroom

By Matthew Tungate

matthew.tungate@education.ky.gov

Which music helps plants grow most? (Techno makes them healthiest, but classical makes them grow fastest.)

Does dog saliva kill bacteria as well as iodine, peroxide and dish soap? (Yes.)

Can sweets be good for kids? If so, what quantity? (Actually this is about what type of feed works best for goats.)

These and nearly 50 more research projects were on display at the Kentucky FFA Agriscience Fair in June at the Lexington Civic Center. It looked like a standard school science fair with folding tables, display boards and a few beakers. Middle and high school students explained their premises, methodology and results to teams of judges.

"It's basically a science fair with an agriculture flavor," said Matt Chaliff, agriculture education program consultant with the Kentucky Department of Education and state FFA executive secretary.

Chaliff said this was the first year the science fair was incorporated into the FFA's annual convention. The last two years, the

Agriscience Fair has been an invitation-only event in McLean County, with 15-20 entries. This year, students had to win locally to participate in the statewide fair.

"We're trying to drive higher levels of science content into our ag classes," he said, "and what better way to drive science content than through students doing research and inquiring and learning? It's actually the most authentic way you can learn."

Having a contest sends the message to local chapters that agriscience research is important, he said. FFA is a co-curricular activity requiring enrollment in an agriculture-related class.

"Everything you do in FFA should grow out of what happens in the classroom," Chaliff said. "So the Agriscience Fair starts in the classroom with students being taught how to do research ... and it builds out of that classroom experience."

Holly Davis, teacher at New Haven Middle School (Nelson County), had seven students participating in the Agriscience Fair. She said her students work on their projects for about a week in her classroom, researching and developing ideas, going over the process and expectations, and conferencing.

"This is a great way to mix your core content classes, like science, math and English, with agriculture," Davis said. "Showing students how this applies to real life can help them make connections in other subjects as well as yours. Students need to feel success and recognition, and this offers an opportunity for more students to get recognized for their hard work and feel successful about completing a project."

Katelan Gibbons, who just finished 9th grade at Jessamine County High School, wanted to research fish. She said her teacher,

Christi Hack, suggested she study how protein affects fish growth.

So Gibbons got 42 tilapia, split them into six tanks by gender and varied the percentage of protein in each tank's diet.

She found at that more than 30 percent protein is fatal in a tilapia's diet. "That was a really sad discovery," she said.

She also discovered that tilapia are found in Africa. "I would have thought tilapia were from Kentucky," Gibbons said.

Hack, an agriculture teacher at the Jessamine Career and Technical Center, said she required students in her Agribiology class to complete an Agriscience Fair project. Eighteen made it to the state competition.

"I think students have a much better understanding of the scientific process as a result of doing the Agriscience Fair. They understand how to research and how to design an experiment to address a problem," she said. "They also understand that research isn't easy. Sometimes processes work and sometimes they don't. You don't always get results the first time. They also gain the ability to write research papers, construct graphs of data and develop logical presentations."

"It is one of the best learning opportunities that agriculture students have. It incorporates a wide array of soft skills that students can use throughout their lives."

Davis agreed. "Throughout the years I have seen my students gain self-confidence, speaking ability, scientific knowledge, experience in topics that surround their subject and overall knowledge about how to interact in a professional setting. These students have been exposed to so much through the Agriscience Fair that they otherwise would have no idea about," she said.



Photo by Amy Wallot

Agriscience fair judge Vishnu Jayamohan floats on student Sean Burnett's human hockey puck at the Kentucky FFA Agriscience Fair on June 10 in Lexington. Burnett, who just completed 8th grade at New Haven Middle School (Nelson County), was one of seven students from the school who entered projects in the fair.

Chaliff said teachers also benefit from the fair.

"It's just a great opportunity to have students learn by doing and apply what they learned in class and to put that to work into doing something," he said. "So rather than lecturing all day long, students are putting that into use."

State winners go to the national FFA convention in October for the national Agriscience Fair.

That motivated one of Davis' students, Sean Burnett, who had just finished 8th grade at New Haven Middle.

Burnett created a hovercraft, which he called a human hockey puck — a circular piece of plywood with a workshop vacuum blowing air underneath.

"It is so interesting because of the design and the fact that he is

only in the 8th grade," Davis said. "He went to National Convention with us last year, and when he came home, after seeing those projects, he said he had to do something great in order to get to go there and compete. He has, by far, created a unique project of all that I have seen as an ag teacher."

When he first proposed the ideas, his classmates were skeptical, Burnett said. Once he built it, though, they thought it was very cool, he said. So what will he do next year?

"I was thinking about building a rocket ship next year," he said with a grin.

## MORE INFO ...

[www.kyffa.org](http://www.kyffa.org)

Matt Chaliff, [matt.chaliff@education.ky.gov](mailto:matt.chaliff@education.ky.gov), (502) 564-3472

## HOW AGRISCIENCE PROJECTS ARE JUDGED

There are five competition areas in the Agriscience Fair:

- biochemistry, microbiology and food science
- engineering
- zoology
- environmental science
- botany

Within each area are four divisions:

- Grade 7-9 individual
- Grade 7-9 team of two
- Grade 10-12 individual
- Grade 10-12 team of two

There are 100 points possible with 10 points possible in each of the following areas:

- knowledge gained
- scientific approach
- experimental research
- individual/teamwork
- thoroughness
- information
- conclusions
- written project report
- interview
- visual display



# Clay County 'Happily Ever After' after reading celebration

By Susan Riddell

susan.riddell@education.ky.gov

Macy Zellars couldn't wait to check out Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs inside the enchanted Oneida Elementary School (Clay County), but like her mother said, "first things first."

Zellars was one of 1,028 district elementary students recognized for reading achievements during the 2008-09 school year, in conjunction with the 11th annual Reading Celebration.

"In short, the event was magnificent," said Karen Lawson, director and event coordinator for Clay County Community Education. "We had approximately 3,500 people in attendance."

The reading celebration picks a theme straight from the pages of thousands of books and runs with it, creating an evening of enchantment and excitement about reading. The theme this time around was "Happily Ever After."

Representatives from each elementary school get to decorate a room.

There was a Hansel and Gretel room where students made gingerbread men, sponsored by Big Creek Elementary School. Hacker Elementary School sponsored a room where students played "Jeopardy" with answers involving classic fairy tales. Manchester Elementary School had a reading of *The Very Smart Pea* and *the Princess-to-Be*.

There also were *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* rooms, among others.

The exterior of the school and the hallways inside were brought to life by the staff at Oneida Elementary.

This is where Zellars could schmooze with Snow White and those dwarfs and where children could traipse barefoot in the sand with Jasmine and Aladdin while picking out colorful play jewelry.

Entering the school, visitors were greeted into an enchanted forest complete with bubble machines, life-size dragons, knights in shining armor, a shiny castle exterior and high school students dressed as characters like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.

"The decorations and the creativity of the staff were beyond words," said Lawson.

The cost for each reading celebration is roughly \$15,000, with local sponsors and donations accounting for most of the support. It is well worth it, however, Lawson said, if its goal of enhancing literacy is met.

"This event encourages and rewards reading by Clay County students as well as promoting literacy to the entire community," Lawson said. "The event has increased students' participation in the Accelerated Reading Program and our overall reading scores, too."

To earn the right to be recognized for reading achievement at the reading celebration, students must meet their individualized reading goals, according to Reecia Samples, assistant superintendent and Title I coordinator of the Clay County school district.

"This goal is set for the student based on a reading level determined by the STAR (Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading) assessment," Samples said. "By using an indi-



Photos by Amy Wallot

Kindergarten student Johnny Hensley Jr. looks for treasure in an "Aladdin"-themed hallway during the Clay County Reading Celebration at Oneida Elementary School. More than 1,000 district elementary students were recognized for reading achievements throughout the 2008-09 school year during the 11th annual event.

vidualized goal for each student, competitiveness among students is reduced."

Students must meet all the following reading goals, set each nine-week period during the school year, to be recognized at the reading celebration:

- book completion within their reading levels
- book points earned must match or exceed goal determined each quarter
- 90 percent or better accuracy on all book tests

Each student receives a plaque and has his or her name called out at the celebration. Students know that to have their names called, they must put forth the effort the entire school year and not just prior to the reading celebration.

"Since students work on reading goals throughout the entire school year, reading and literacy promotion doesn't just happen a few weeks in advance of the reading celebration event, but is occurring daily," Samples said.

Another big hit at each reading celebration is Authors' Row. Several authors — most with eastern Kentucky ties — gather to sell and autograph books at the event, all the while conversing with students on the

importance of literacy and reading.

"Authors' Row was added due to the fact that the (celebration) committee felt it was important for students to be exposed to role models in the literary field," Lawson said.

At the Happily Ever After celebration, authors such as Gurney Norman, Joyce Bowling and Preacher Bill Holeman were in attendance.

Norman is Kentucky's Poet Laureate as well as being an author and professor. Bowling is a primary teacher at Manchester Elementary and has written literary and poetry books. Holeman travels to schools and performs as a ventriloquist with two wooden dolls. He is the author of *Dummy in the Middle*.

The reading celebration hands out awards but has received them as well, earning many community involvement and literacy awards along the way.

Additional pictures from the 2009 Clay County Reading Celebration can be viewed at [www.clay.k12.ky.us](http://www.clay.k12.ky.us).

## MORE INFO...

[www.clay.kyschools.us](http://www.clay.kyschools.us)

Karen Lawson, [karen.lawson@clay.kyschools.us](mailto:karen.lawson@clay.kyschools.us), (606) 598-1601



Manchester Elementary School (Clay County) 1st-grade student Macy Zellars talks with Cinderella, portrayed by Clay County High School student Whitney Jackson, at the Clay County Reading Celebration at Oneida Elementary on May 22.



# Marcum's passion for books helps bring her library to life

By Susan Riddell

susan.riddell@education.ky.gov

Alecia Marcum went to an elementary school that didn't have a library, and that deprivation paved the way for her career path as a library media specialist (LMS).

"I always enjoyed going to school, but I did not have an actual library until I was in the 7th grade," said Marcum, who is starting her 22nd year as an LMS in the Warren County school district. "I had a librarian, Barbara Wilson, who allowed me to help in the library and to read to some of the students in the elementary classrooms as a student worker. I knew that I always wanted to do some type of work in the elementary classroom or in the library."

Marcum has made the most of her time in the library media specialist field and was recently honored as the Outstanding School Media Librarian by the Kentucky School Media Association.

Marcum has served as the LMS at William Natcher Elementary School since 1990. Principal Stephanie Martin said Marcum has a real passion for learning.

"She inspires all of her students and staff to love reading," Martin said. "Alecia is enthusiastic about every new book that enters the library. She believes the library is a special place where everyone should feel welcome, and she works hard to make it inviting and special."

Throughout her experiences as an LMS, Marcum has seen technology advance her field as it has most others. The constant, however, has been her students' unwavering love of reading.

"Education has had many changes throughout the years, especially in technology, but the one thing that has not changed is that children still love books, and they love to get excited about stories," Marcum said.

Marcum fosters that love of books in many ways, whether it's as a class or individually.

"Students are allowed to use the library at point of need rather than on a rigid fixed schedule," she said. "In the past we have been more flexibly scheduled, but due to the size of our enrollment, this has led to more scheduled classes in order to see more students and to allow for teachers' plan-

ning time.

"We try to encourage students to select books for their reading enjoyment and to come to the library as often as they would like to continue that throughout the week," Marcum added. "We get students to read by having a variety of activities and themes throughout the year to get our school involved. We have two book fairs each year. These are not like in the past when we would just open the book fair cases. We now have themes that help get our families more involved. It helps create a fun environment not only for our students but for their entire families as well."

Marcum's most popular means of encouraging her students to get excited about reading is to bring in authors to talk to and read to her students. She usually has two authors come in each year, and she makes it into a huge production, because, "authors and illustrators are an important part of our media center," she said. "We have their work framed in our library along with two author quilts that represent each author who has visited our school throughout the years."

"I really feel that literature is so important to help students identify with others and to learn more about themselves," Marcum added. "We began having authors visit about 15 years ago, and this has been one of the highlights within our school."

Among the authors who have visited are *Goosebumps* creator R. L. Stine and Kentucky author George Ella Lyon. Paul Brett Johnson has visited the school on three occasions, and he even used students there as



Photo by Amy Wallot

Library media specialist (LMS) Alecia Marcum talks with 4th-grade students Hannah Patterson, left, Deontez Patterson, center, and Joe Todd as they draw pictures to illustrate a story at William Natcher Elementary School (Warren County) on March 26. Marcum begins her 22nd year at the school this month.

models for one of his books, *Farmer's Market*. Leigh Anne Florence, author of the popular *Woody Book* series, Pamela Duncan Edwards, Marcia Thornton Jones, Debbie Dady and illustrators Chris Canyon, Tedd Arnold and Floyd Cooper also have visited.

Canyon and his wife, Jeannette (also an illustrator), will visit the school in the spring, following Chris Soentpiet's visit in the fall. Soentpiet is an illustrator from New York.

The reaction by the students toward the authors and illustrators has been consistently strong over the years.

"I am so proud to see students become excited about literature especially after they have a visiting author come to our school," Marcum added. "When students come in and request authors' books after they have visited our school, I know they have made a significant impact that will be with the students forever."

Along with stronger reading skills, this impact carries over into each student's writing skills.

"This encourages them to become better writers and

illustrators through the presentations and examples that are shared," Marcum said.

"I know it impacts our reading and writing scores," Martin added. "I don't have hard data, but I do think it has to impact these academic skills. I also think it helps build our strong culture as our students are very respectful and welcoming to all who visit our school, whether it's an author or not."

"I believe it is this extra effort she puts forth that makes the library come alive to all," Martin said of Marcum's use of authors. "She prepares her students so well about that particular author or illustrator that when they visit our school, they are (treated) like rock stars. These visitors are always commenting that the students are so prepared and have such great background knowledge of their work that it is a great compliment to them."

## Suggested Reading

With the 2009-10 school year starting this month, Alecia Marcum suggests these books for children who may have some reservations about the upcoming year:

- *First Day Jitters*, by Julie Danneburg
- *The Teacher from the Black Lagoon*, by Mike Thayer
- *The Kissing Hand*, by Audrey Penn

## MORE INFO...

[www.warren.k12.ky.us/~natcher/Faculty/Library\\_Media\\_Center/Library\\_Media\\_Center.html](http://www.warren.k12.ky.us/~natcher/Faculty/Library_Media_Center/Library_Media_Center.html)

Alecia Marcum, [alecia.marcum@warren.kyschools.us](mailto:alecia.marcum@warren.kyschools.us), (270) 842-1364



# PLCs support and inspire teachers, student achievement

**Paul Schaumburg**

Community Relations Director  
Graves County School District

Standardized testing has changed the role of the teacher. In spirit, that role once resembled of a private contractor who chose what to teach, when and how. Over time, it has shifted to shared accountability throughout entire grades and schools.

That, in turn, has led to sharing ideas and teaching techniques.

The Graves County school district's teachers and students are now benefiting from an effective variation on this theme with the implementation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC).

Graves County has experienced success as a result of collaboration. The district's academic index has progressed from 70.4 in 1999 to 93.2 in 2006.

A key contributor to that success was the early creation and implementation of the District Instructional Leadership Team and the district's involvement in the State Action Education Leadership (SAELP) and Kentucky Cohesive Leadership System (KyCLS) leadership development projects.

"Graves County serves as a model for districts across the state and demonstrates the kind of PLC that we support in our Kentucky Instructional Leadership Team Network," said Debbie Daniels, state KyCLS director. "Graves County leadership teams are great example of how effective instructional leadership teams that function as a PLC can impact student achievement. I highly recommend Symsonia Elementary School as a school to visit for those interested in developing PLCs and instructional leadership teams."

The aggregation of administrators and outstanding teachers continues to lead the district's instruction in general and specifically is leading the PLC efforts.

"One of our most important ideas is that how well students achieve is a direct function of what the adults do," Tommy Scott, assistant superintendent for instruction, said. "Assessment is such a big part of education today, but most dis-



Photo by Paul Schaumburg

*Symsonia Elementary School (Graves County) 3rd-grade teachers Amy Archer, left, Julie Robertson, center, and Courtney Poynor discuss ways to reach specific students with specific content. The Graves County school district's schools, teachers and students are benefiting from teachers' sharing ideas in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and implementing those ideas in their classrooms. The teachers attribute the success of their PLC to trust, honesty, collaboration and shared accountability.*

tricts just take the data and put it on a shelf somewhere and never use it. We continuously assess and continuously break down the data to adjust what we do in the classroom. Otherwise, assessment has no purpose.

"The old teaching model isolated teachers," Scott added. "A great teacher and a very ineffective teacher could be doing totally different things in rooms next to each other, separated by a wall, and never really know what the other was doing. Imagine how much more we can do when we learn from each other. Shared accountability has brought down those walls and led to shared support."

Scott is quick to point out that the PLC collaboration is not designed as a job evaluation of a teacher because that would be counterproductive and would not allow for free flow of ideas and discussion. Rather, the discussion is meant to be supportive, informative and inspirational.

"The idea is for teachers to learn from one another in a positive, proactive way," he said. "These individual PLCs are structuring their meetings based on individual situ-

ations. In some cases, they have a common planning time. In other cases, they meet after school. And some schools think the PLCs are so important that once a month they'll hire substitute teachers who float throughout the school to allow those PLCs to meet throughout a specified day."

"Teachers call one another to task in a professional manner," Elementary Instructional Supervisor Kim Harrison said. "It's a far more collaborative culture than in the past. The nature of the PLC is both loose and tight at the same time. It's tight in the sense that progress needs to be made. It's loose in the sense that the teachers determine how to do it."

In recent years, Graves County has embraced and integrated into its culture the ideas of current national leaders in studying and teaching instructional and learning techniques such as Robert Marzano, Rick DuFour, Mike Schmoker and Mike Rutherford.

"We're willing to learn wherever and from whomever we can," Harrison said. "Then, when our teachers put those ideas into practice and share their own experiences, more

teachers and students benefit."

PLCs take many forms, and many arise spontaneously. A half-dozen intermediate science teachers from different elementary schools have created one and communicate primarily by e-mail. Other PLCs are formed around middle school learning teams, high school freshman and career academies and various academic subjects. A natural and common grouping, particularly within a school, is by grade level.

One very effective PLC that impressed Symsonia Elementary Principal Lisa Gamble is made up of her school's 3rd-grade teachers Amy Archer, Julie Robertson and Courtney Poynor. "I've seen them working together, examining student data and determining what specific techniques work best with which students," Gamble said. "They impress me with their professionalism and genuine collaboration."

"We are committed to it; we meet weekly; we have no excuses," Archer said. "We set our norms in the beginning with the idea that this PLC is focused only on student learning and nothing else. We

make sure of that every time we meet. We have a grade-level meeting for student behavior and other issues. But our PLC is focused strictly on our data analysis. Sometimes we reach outside our group to other teachers and schools to see what they're doing well."

All three teachers attribute the success within their PLC and its classroom application to four tenets — trust, honesty, collaboration and shared accountability — even in subjects the individual doesn't teach. Previously, all of Symsonia Elementary's 3rd-grade teachers taught all subjects. Now, they departmentalize some subjects.

"I think since we're departmentalized that all of the math could fall on Amy," Poynor said. "But since we get together to talk about it, if the assessments come back and say that math needs work, I'm going to feel like I'm accountable for that, too, because I had input on it."

"Nobody is trying to be better than the others," Robertson said. "We really are working together to be an effective team as a school in teaching our students. I think we trust each other a lot."

"When we meet, we're willing to listen to each other and take immediate action. We don't wait until the next grading period. That very week after talking, we're doing things differently, if something was suggested that we thought would work."

"It makes me feel more confident when Julie and Amy agree that something I will try is a good idea," Poynor said. "I don't feel uncomfortable discussing my weaknesses or areas where I need to grow within my own PLC."

"What we're all about is student learning," Archer said. "So, if what we're putting ourselves on the line for is student learning, then it's worth it."

## MORE INFO...

[www.graves.k12.ky.us](http://www.graves.k12.ky.us)

Tommy Scott, [tommy.scott@graves.kyschools.us](mailto:tommy.scott@graves.kyschools.us)

Kim Harrison, [kim.harrison@graves.kyschools.us](mailto:kim.harrison@graves.kyschools.us)



# Teacher uses sewing to overcome 'tears'

By Matthew Tungate

matthew.tungate@education.ky.gov

Teachers' work attire often carries students' tears at the Georgia Chaffee Westport Teenage Parent Program (TAPP) (Jefferson County), and Mary Ludwig helps the young mothers use sewing to mend both their clothes and their lives.

Ludwig, a family and consumer sciences teacher at the school for pregnant and parenting girls, has implemented a cutting-edge program, "The Fabric of Life." Through her program, Ludwig helps students learn sewing, teamwork and entrepreneurial skills, along with ways to improve their self-esteem. For her efforts, Ludwig was named the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences 2008 National Teacher of the Year.

One of Ludwig's days at the end of the last school year started with tears of the emotional variety. A student went to her class in the morning telling of a dramatic situation at home, and "she felt close enough to me to come in and talk to me. I didn't cry with her this morning, but I have."

Ludwig made arrangements to allow the student to stay with her all day. "We get very close to a lot of kids," she said. "That probably sets the tone for our school. You don't get that everywhere; you don't get that opportunity to get that close to kids and to help them make a difference in their lives."

Junior Gabriela Nova, 17, said Ludwig is always there to listen to students.

"She's more than just a teacher; she's a friend. You can relate to her in different ways," Nova said. "She tells a lot of her personal things, and you can relate to them. She's like a part of your family."

It's that attitude that students love about Ludwig, according to junior Paige Ladd.

"Whenever I'm down, I come in here and I get relief," she said.

The 22-year veteran teacher began at the school in 1994 teaching adult living and child development. It wasn't until 2000, though, that Ludwig was able to combine her passion for fashion with the opportunity to train students for a

vocation to become a full-fledged sewing program.

"The Fabric of Life" consists of Fashion 1 and 2 classes, encompassing mathematics, science, teamwork and creating a community within the classroom. In her Fashion 1 class, Ludwig sparks the students' interest in sewing and teaches them basic concepts. In her Fashion 2 class, Ludwig uses "Sewing Pals," two or three students with different skill levels and learning styles who are grouped together, to build a sense of community and allow students to learn from and help each other.

She operates in two rooms with a door between them. One is set up for introductory sewing and parenting classes. The second room she calls the "sewing studio," where the sewing and embroidery machines are housed.

Students start with hand sewing; their first project is a pin cushion. Ludwig draws the pattern, and students cut and sew it. Ludwig said watching students complete the project shows how well they follow directions, as well as their work habits, creativity and manual dexterity.

She has 16 basic sewing tools in the class, and she has developed a PowerPoint user guide for them. The only written test her students take is related to the use of these tools. Instead, students are graded on their projects. She said she doesn't expect perfection. Every project has a rubric, so students know how they're being evaluated, Ludwig said.

"This class is not just a bunny class," she said.

After hand-sewing, students start learning to use a sewing machine, practicing their skills by sewing on paper. They also demonstrate various skills necessary to safely and correctly operate the sewing machine, resulting in their "Sewing Machine Operator's License." Their first project is a 13-inch square pillow on the sewing machine. Another project is a felt growth chart for their babies. Students also learn to machine quilt and machine embroider and eventually participate in her school-based enterprise, where students in the Fashion 2 class design



Photo by Amy Wallot

Mary Ludwig, sophomore Dawn Wood, left, and junior Paige Ladd, right, watch as senior Trenisha Bell embroiders a baby blanket with a child's name and birth date during Ludwig's Fashion 2 class at the Georgia Chaffee Westport Teenage Parent Program (TAPP) (Jefferson County). Ludwig has been teaching at the TAPP school since 1994.

and sew items for the school staff and those in the community as a fund raiser.

The money that the enterprise generates is used to award a small scholarship to the outstanding senior fashion student. Funds also help purchase the supplies needed for the embroidery machines.

She has pictures of many of her students with their projects.

"We've done a million blankets at least," Ludwig said.

Many students will leave one or more of their projects with her when they leave the school, Ludwig said.

"I think they want to leave a piece of themselves here," she said.

TAPP Director Sara York said Ludwig uses a variety of strategies to motivate, teach and encourage her students.

"She is so passionate about her subject matter that the students can't help but get caught up in the excitement in the classroom," York said.

When she started the program, TAPP had only about five sewing machines and no embroidery machines, Ludwig said. She was able to buy several through local and national grants and inherited others from schools eliminating

their sewing programs. Now, the school has more than 20 sewing machines and seven embroidery machines. Since the program's inception, enrollment in her classes has more than doubled.

"Mary has taken her classes from a few students sewing baby quilts to packed classes where students learn lifelong skills that can lead to future employment," York said. "Mary doesn't just teach sewing as sewing. She teaches it as a fine art that can enhance anyone's life. She builds students' confidence as they create 'masterpieces' that they never believed their own hands could ever create."

On the day late last year, Ludwig was soft-spoken with her students as she explained the difference between two-dimensional patterns on paper and the three-dimensional finished product.

She seemed more like an aunt teaching her nieces to sew. She was helping three students at the same time: one on a sewing machine, one on a pattern and one on a computer.

Her 11 students on this particu-

lar day — all in various stages of pregnancy and post-pregnancy — were in groups in the two classrooms, some on sewing machines while others were hand-sewing.

One student said, "I'm out of bobbin," and another asked Ludwig, "Can I show her how to do it?"

When the bell rang, it was like some sort of alternate reality: students asked Ludwig if they could take work home.

Senior Trenisha Bell made her daughter an Easter dress and finished it at home.

"Sewing class is very different," Bell said. "If you start something, you want to finish it."

That's the way the class is supposed to work, Ludwig said, with the girls loving what they do and supporting each other.

Ladd said Ludwig leads by example in both areas.

"She does a lot of the things that teachers in regular school don't take time to do," Ladd said. "Teachers need to understand to take time and listen to students."

## MORE INFO...

[www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/schools/special/WestportTAPP/index.html](http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/schools/special/WestportTAPP/index.html)  
Mary Ludwig, [mary.ludwig@jefferson.kyschools.us](mailto:mary.ludwig@jefferson.kyschools.us), (502) 485-8347



# Preschool programs recognized for high-quality practice, instruction

Three public preschool teachers recently received Classroom of Excellence Awards from the Kentucky Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Development. The three are Christine Clark, The Family and Children's Place (Jefferson County); Lisa Mudd, Dixie Elementary School (Fayette County); and April Throgmorton, Morgan Elementary School (Paducah Independent).

The voluntary Classrooms of Excellence program identifies high-quality state-funded preschool classrooms, based on a comprehensive review of activities and methodology. Applicants participate in an intensive self-study and also must show that their classrooms meet specific criteria:

- use of the Building A Strong Foundation series, which includes preschool standards, parent guides, continuous assessment tools and the Quality Self Study
- a minimum average score of 6.0 on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R)
- an "Exemplary" category score on the Early Learning and Language Classroom Observation (ELLCO)
- Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (IECE) certification or Letter of

Exemption for lead teachers

- regional or national accreditation, either current or in progress

In addition, Calloway County Preschool Center has been recognized as Kentucky's first Early Childhood Center of Excellence. The Rowan County Preschool Center also joins four previously identified Centers of Quality.

The Early Childhood Centers of Quality designation was developed in 2008 as a response to stakeholder recommendations for statewide services to deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired students. Centers that achieve this distinction serve as models of practice for other districts in the region through on-site consultation, mentoring and presentations at state, regional and national levels.

Successful applicants for the designation included the following components:

- state-funded preschool program located in a stand-alone facility with an on-site administrator
- on-site services provided to children with visual and hearing impairments
- services provided within regular early childhood classrooms
- national or regional early childhood

accreditation

- Kentucky Early Childhood Standards and Parent Guides implemented
- ongoing assessment data utilized in classroom instructional planning
- professional development individualized for the staff

Additional criteria for Centers of Excellence, implemented for the first time this year, include:

- Center of Quality designation
- use of the Building A Strong Foundation series, which includes preschool standards
- parent guides, continuous assessment

tools and Quality Self Study

- a minimum, combined average center score of 6.0 on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) and meet all substantial portion of the day indicators (1/3 of preschool day consists of child-initiated learning/activities)
- majority of teachers hold IECE certification
- receive on-site review visit

## MORE INFO...

[www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=COE](http://www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=COE)

## Suicide-prevention toolkit available to Kentucky educators

Although being a teenager can mean having some great moments, it can also mean being stuck between being a kid and an adult — sometimes feeling like one or the other, depending on the day. These days, youth have new things to deal with socially and academically and face new types of pressures. For even the happiest teenager, these years can cause anxiety and confusion.

Teenage suicide is becoming more common every year in the United States and now ranks behind only car accidents and homicides among leading causes of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24. In Kentucky, suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens.

As part of ongoing suicide prevention efforts, mental health professionals and advocates have created an educational toolkit for schools. The toolkits are free and available for educational professionals throughout the state.

Through a federal youth suicide prevention grant, Kentucky Child Now and the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Ser-

vices are offering Signs of Suicide (SOS) program toolkits for middle and high schools in Kentucky. The SOS program is a nationally recognized school-based suicide prevention initiative designed for tweens and teens. It aims to teach students how to address issues related to depression by identifying symptoms within themselves and among their friends. Students are encouraged to use the ACT technique (Acknowledge, Care, Tell).

The requirements for receiving a free kit include:

- signing a memorandum of agreement with clearly identified training and implementation dates
- participating in a one-hour suicide prevention training for school, staff or community members
- completing a brief evaluation of results

## MORE INFO...

[www.kychildnow.org/index.php/traininginstitute/sos](http://www.kychildnow.org/index.php/traininginstitute/sos)

Karen Napier, (502) 227-7722



Photo by Amy Wallot

## Botanical education

Woodford County High School English teacher Taylor Marshall looks over a raised garden bed at The Arboretum in Lexington during a school gardening workshop on June 12. Teachers toured the state botanical gardens as part of the Gardening with Class workshop where participants saw demonstrations of raised beds, examples of worm composting, viewed rain gardens and rain barrels and learned ways to incorporate environmental education into their classrooms.



## HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION

# Strong learning climate heats up education quality

This is the first article in a series about High Quality Instruction (HQI) in your schools. The series is designed to demonstrate connections between HQI and the instructional core concept of student, teacher and content and how these elements influence and are influenced by each other. Each element of the instructional core is a point of entry for improving teaching and learning.

By Susan Riddell

susan.riddell@education.ky.gov

It doesn't matter if it's in a traditional classroom, a music room or a school gymnasium, a strong learning climate is critical to a student's success.

"Learning climate means everything to me," said Deborah Anderson-Morton, a reading, science and Spanish teacher at Conway Middle School (Jefferson County). "I look at it as the 'glass' in which good teaching and learning take place. If the glass or environment is broken, cracked or not intact, what's inside the glass — great instruction — will be lost."

Susanne Burkhardt, the 2007 Kentucky Teacher of the Year and a student achievement coordinator with Southside Elementary School (Shelby County), said learning climate is the "feel and routine of a classroom. The climate is the day-in and day-out atmosphere of the classroom.

"I think of climate as the surrounding that teachers create through their attitude and expectations and the way students respond," she added. "The attitude of the teacher is the single most important element in developing a positive classroom climate."

Donna Lynch agreed that a good learning climate starts with a positive attitude.

"A strong learning climate exists in a classroom where the teacher has the belief that all students have value and can succeed, and where varied teaching strategies are utilized," said Lynch, a teacher at Meade County Area Technology Center for the past 22 years. "The teacher is not afraid to show that he or she

respects students and thus receives respect in return."

Lynch caters her learning climate to the increasing maturity and intelligence of today's high school students. She also shows students her commitment to them outside the classroom.

"I show my students that I have a sense of humor," said Lynch, who also teaches for the Kentucky Virtual High School. "I show I care about them by giving them my e-mail address and my cell phone number, and I tell them that if they need me, I am available for them outside of school."

In an effort to be there for her students outside of school, Anderson-Morton has students fill out surveys at the beginning of each year to see what their interests are.

"Once I compile this data, I try to support my students outside of the classroom by attending some of their events — basketball games, dirt bike competitions, cheerleading, dance team events and archery competitions," Anderson-Morton said. "This is so very vital in getting to know who students really are. I have done home visits to share good news with parents, but I also visit

homes to make a connection between in-class learning and their modes of learning at home. I find that there is so much disconnect between our classrooms and our children's home environments. I try to bridge that gap."

Among Burkhardt's duties at Southside Elementary is working with new teachers to build high-quality learning climates. When doing this, she often touches on her past experiences as a primary teacher.

"I felt my learning climate was enhanced by having students seated close to one



Photo by Amy Wallot

Fourth-grade teacher Mandy Dykes, left, and Student Achievement Consultant Susanne Burkhardt dance with students while they sing a song the students made up during their morning meeting at Southside Elementary School (Shelby County) on May 28. Burkhardt often touches on her past experiences as a primary teacher when working with new teachers to build high-quality learning climates.

another and close to me," said Burkhardt, an 18-year veteran in primary classrooms. "I could tell from facial expressions and responses what students needed right away to be successful. Students also were more accountable to the classroom when our proximity was closer. Cooperative work, classroom goals and our class promise also provided some of these benefits."

Burkhardt's class promise was read aloud every day by her students when she taught at Simpsonville Elementary School (Shelby County), and variations of that promise were emphasized each day by other teachers at the school as well. Burkhardt indicated she plans to share it with Southside teachers this year.

With the school year getting underway this month, it's important to set this proper tone right off the bat, Lynch said.

"I have seen teachers — especially new teachers — get so overwhelmed with discipline issues that their classrooms become negative environments for everyone,"

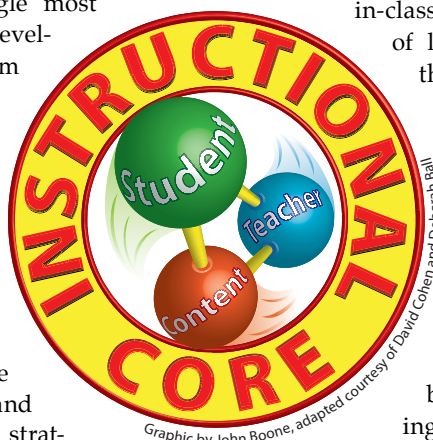
Lynch said. "These discipline issues — disrespect, acting out, lack of effort — begin to define the class. Once that pattern starts, it is very difficult to reverse. The tone for the entire year is set in the very beginning of the course."

Teachers need to "get ideas from other teachers, make sure they are not beginning the class on a negative note, show students they are excited to start a new year, plan hands-on activities that relate to curriculum, and they shouldn't be afraid to show a sense of humor," Lynch added. "Teachers will know they are doing a good job when the students get excited about learning."

Should a negative learning climate enter a classroom, teachers "are creating a toxic environment that has a negative impact on them, the students and the school," Lynch said.

Other pitfalls of not having a sound learning climate occur when teachers

(See **Strong** on page 15)





# Cs, Ds not enough for Eminence middle, high school students

By Matthew Tungate

matthew.tungate@education.ky.gov

When the 2009-10 school year begins, middle and high school teachers in the Eminence Independent school district will not award Cs or Ds to students above 5th grade.

And failure is not an option.

"You'll have to make an A or a B in all of your courses in order to earn credit at the high school level and in order to be promoted at the middle school level," Principal Steve Frommeyer said.

Six years ago, the school district began phasing out D grades. The high school phased in the new grading scale, while the middle school eliminated Ds "cold turkey," Frommeyer said. About a year ago, the district moved from no Ds to no Cs.

"Now, after a six-year journey, we'll be fully implemented," he said.

As the middle school principal at the onset of the Kentucky Education Reform Act in the early 1990s, he and other administrators noticed that most middle schools promoted students even if they failed one or two core classes.

At that time the school decided that students had to pass all of their classes for the year to be promoted. Then students began "playing the game" of getting a 65 percent to get a D so they could pass.

"Ds just don't make it in the world today. Kids that make Ds are not going to college, they're not successful in high school, they're not doing well in transition to adult life," Frommeyer said.

So school officials decided to eliminate Ds, which their research showed were equivalent to novice scoring on state assessments. That brought all students to at least apprentice level. But that wasn't enough, Frommeyer said.

"The goal in Kentucky is proficient-level work, not apprentice-level work," he said. "When people hire employees or when you go to college, nobody looks for D- and C-level employees."

So the school took the final step that all students should be proficient in all their subjects before

moving on. At the middle school level, retention has increased slightly, while the high school hasn't seen much change, Frommeyer said.

"I guess the moral of the story is that kids rise to the occasion," he said. "There's never been a case where the kids with effort haven't been able to meet our standards."

That's because teachers and administrators have put in extra effort to make sure students can make As and Bs.

"To tell kids, 'Hey, you've got to meet higher standards,' but not provide additional remediation and support would be unfair," Frommeyer said.

Within the school day, middle school students get remediation if they are struggling during a skills period. That will be added to the high school this year, Frommeyer said.

Teachers agree to stay after school to help students improve their skills as part of Extended School Services, as well.

Cara Puckett, an 11th- and 12th-grade English/language arts teacher at Eminence High School, adopted the no-Cs policy a year early. If a student did not pass a test with an 80 or better, he or she had to restudy and take another version of the test.

"So far, I have not had students fail since I implemented this — in the past, if they scored a D or F and were allowed to keep that grade, not retake, those students would never go back and relearn, eventually failing the class," Puckett said. "This stops that pattern of failure at the point of their first failure."

Buddy Berry, a high school mathematics teacher and guidance counselor, said Eminence teachers have to constantly monitor students to make sure they are mastering content.

"If teachers wait to assess students at traditional test points, it will be too late for their grades to recover and for providing remediation," he said.

From the beginning six years ago, the school had a "critical mass" of teachers who were on board, but it was not 100 percent, Frommeyer



Photo by Amy Wallot

Senior Ed Berry Jr. works on a test during Buddy Berry's (no relation) calculus class at Eminence High School (Eminence Independent) on March 13. Beginning this school year, middle and high school students in the school district will not receive C or D grades.

said. That minority helped improve the process, he said.

Berry said he was initially apprehensive about eliminating Cs and Ds when he arrived at his alma mater two years ago.

"I felt it was essential to not just raise the minimum scoring for the sake of doing so. There had to be a solid plan for ensuring that mastery truly occurred," he said. "We couldn't allow grade inflation to be the result of the new system. However, it makes total sense that if the state's goal is for proficiency that a student who scores a 65 percent isn't proficient. We are simply trying to walk the talk."

Frommeyer compared his students' grades with their Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) results. What he found was that if an Emi-

nence student makes an A, he or she is capable of distinguished and proficient. B work should result in proficient. C is apprentice, D or F is novice, Frommeyer said.

"We train our teachers to create classroom assessments that mirror the state assessments in type of question, content covered and quality of response expected," he said. "Rubrics as tough as or often tougher than the ones used on the state assessment are used and are crucial."

The grade correlation to KCCT results is 82 percent, Frommeyer said.

"That ensures that, in fact, we have some integrity to the system and we're not just playing a shell game," he said.

Puckett said she had a 97

percent accuracy rate when she compared her grades to KCCT results.

"Our students are learning that they can't just receive an effort grade or schmooze a grade out of a teacher but must actually be able to reach these proficiencies in order to pass the course," she said.

Besides phasing-in implementation and making sure extra support is available for students, Frommeyer suggested any school interested in eliminating Cs and Ds should train teachers in competency-based instruction. That means teachers don't move students forward until they've become competent in the subjects the school is trying to teach.

The single biggest concept is chunking — breaking curriculum down into smaller pieces that students can demonstrate through formative and summative assessments, he said.

Frommeyer said his school is getting results (combined middle school and high school accountability index of 92) despite having 50 percent of its students eligible for free or reduced-price meals and only spending about half as much per pupil as the state average.

"We're getting tremendous results for the investment of money and the population we serve," he said.

Frommeyer said other schools and districts have not embraced the idea, however. He said he thinks he knows why.

"The people that need it are the ones for whom it's the scariest to implement, and that's the schools that serve at-risk kids that have these big achievement gaps," he said. "This is the missing piece on closing the achievement gap."

The vast majority of parents have been thankful for the changes, Frommeyer said.

"They want to know when their kids finish 8th grade that they're ready for high school or that they're on grade level," he said. "They don't send them to school and hope for the best."

## MORE INFO...

[www.eminence.k12.ky.us](http://www.eminence.k12.ky.us)

Steve Frommeyer, [steve.frommeyer@eminence.kyschools.us](mailto:steve.frommeyer@eminence.kyschools.us), (502) 845-4788



## LEADERSHIP LETTER

Compiled by Susan Riddell, [susan.riddell@education.ky.gov](mailto:susan.riddell@education.ky.gov)

### Program helps at-risk students in the classroom

When Burgin Elementary School (Burgin Independent) Principal Margaret Collier first heard of the Positive Approach to Student Success (PASS) program, she knew it would be a good fit for her district.

"I first heard about PASS in an informational session through the Central Kentucky Special Education Cooperative (CKESC), and I felt the PASS programs fit a need we had in our school," Collier said. "It also fit nicely with the positive school-wide and classroom approach to student discipline we were already implementing."

CKESC provided the training and materials to implement PASS in the Burgin school district that includes Burgin Elementary School (P-5) and Burgin High School, which houses grades 6-12.

The PASS program's main goal is to decrease disruptive student behavior that often can infringe upon classroom learning.

Students can experience emotional or behavioral problems such as sudden outbursts of anger directed at either teachers or classmates. Collier said PASS is for any of these high-risk students at the third tier, the intensive level of response to intervention.

"At this level, students need intensive, individualized interventions," Collier said. "I decided to implement PASS at the elementary level instead of middle or high school levels because of the belief that the earlier we intervene, the more successful that intervention will be."

There is a referral process to get students into the PASS program, Collier said, that includes a classroom teacher who is referring a student for the program, the PASS teacher, the guidance counselor, the principal, the parents and any outside support personnel involved with the student.

Students in the program go to a specific PASS classroom where the assigned program teacher and instructional assistant work with students on social and behavioral skills needed for classroom success. Academic curriculum also is included in the PASS classroom so that students don't fall behind on their work.

When deemed ready for return to the normal classroom setting, students do so while PASS teachers continue to support and monitor those students. Students who revert back to old ways then can be pulled back into a PASS classroom on an as-needed basis.

Now heading into its third year, the Burgin PASS program is in full force.

"We continue to refine and revise the pro-

gram to fit our students' needs," Collier said. "We are going to do some informational sessions with teachers at the beginning of the school year to review the purpose of PASS, the referral process and the responsibilities of all stakeholders."

For its efforts, Burgin Independent recently received the 2009 PEAK (Public Education Achieves in Kentucky) Award from the Kentucky School Boards Association. The award was first handed out in 1997, and it is bestowed upon public school districts that develop and improve student learning skills.

To learn how to nominate a student achievement program for the fall PEAK award, go to [www.ksba.org/peak](http://www.ksba.org/peak).

### Fifteen public schools make *Newsweek* list

Fifteen Kentucky public high schools have been named to "America's Top Public High Schools" list from *Newsweek* for 2009.

The list includes the top 1,500 public schools in the country on a ranking system based on a ratio devised from the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and/or Cambridge tests taken by all students at a school in 2008 divided by the number of graduating seniors.

All of the schools on the list are in the top 6 percent of public schools measured this way.

DuPont Manual High School (Jefferson County) is the highest-ranked school in the state, coming in at No. 126 on the list. The Jefferson County school district also had four other schools on the list, including Eastern High School (No. 618); Ballard High School (No. 758); Male Traditional High School (No. 817); and Brown High School (No. 967).

The Oldham County school district placed all three of its high or secondary schools on the list with North Oldham High School (No. 242); South Oldham High School (No. 772); and Oldham County High School (No. 1,352).

Other Kentucky schools making the list

are Beechwood High School (No. 487; Beechwood Independent); Bowling Green High School (No. 566; Bowling Green Independent); Holmes High School (No. 583; Covington Independent); Highlands High School (No. 585; Ft. Thomas Independent); Paul Laurence Dunbar High School (No. 879; Fayette County); Woodford County High School (No. 1,141); and Ryle High School (No. 1,182; Boone County).

All 15 schools also made the list last year with the exception of North Oldham, South Oldham, Male and Brown.

### Link becomes KASS president

The Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (KASS) recently selected Brady Link of Christian County as its new president. Link replaces former Fleming County Superintendent Kelley Crain.

Link, who became superintendent of the Christian County school district in July 2008, began his education career in Tennessee, where he spent 13 years as a middle school social studies teacher. He then served as a principal during the next 12 years, primarily at three high schools in Kentucky and Tennessee.

During the past 11 years, he has been employed as a superintendent, first in Owen County and then in Graves County from 2000-2008 and now in Christian County. He was selected in 2005 as the KASS Administrator of the Year.

Link's leadership has included his participation in several education-improvement initiatives across Kentucky. They include charter membership in the Kentucky Superintendent CEO Network; membership in the KASS Legislative Superintendents' Advisory Committee, the Bell South Regional Superintendents' Network and the Kentucky Blue Ribbon Council for Improving School Performance.

Crain completed her year as the first woman to lead the superintendent's association.

Pikeville Independent Superintendent Jerry Green has been elected as the association's vice president. Fayette County Superintendent Stu Silberman is now the organization's president-elect.

Also during a recent KASS conference, former Ft. Thomas Independent Superintendent Fred Williams was honored with the association's Distinguished Service Award. Williams was recognized for his years of service with the New Superintendent Training Program and the Superintendent Mentoring Program.



Photo by David W. Smith/Bowling Green Daily News

### Exceptional teacher

*Cumberland Trace Elementary School (Warren County) teacher Patrice McCrary claps with her students during a surprise ceremony on April 22 at the school. McCrary was inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame in Emporia, Kan. in June. Since the inaugural induction ceremonies in 1992, 85 educators from 34 states and the District of Columbia have been inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame. McCrary was Kentucky's 2003 Elementary Teacher of the Year.*



## BULLETIN BOARD

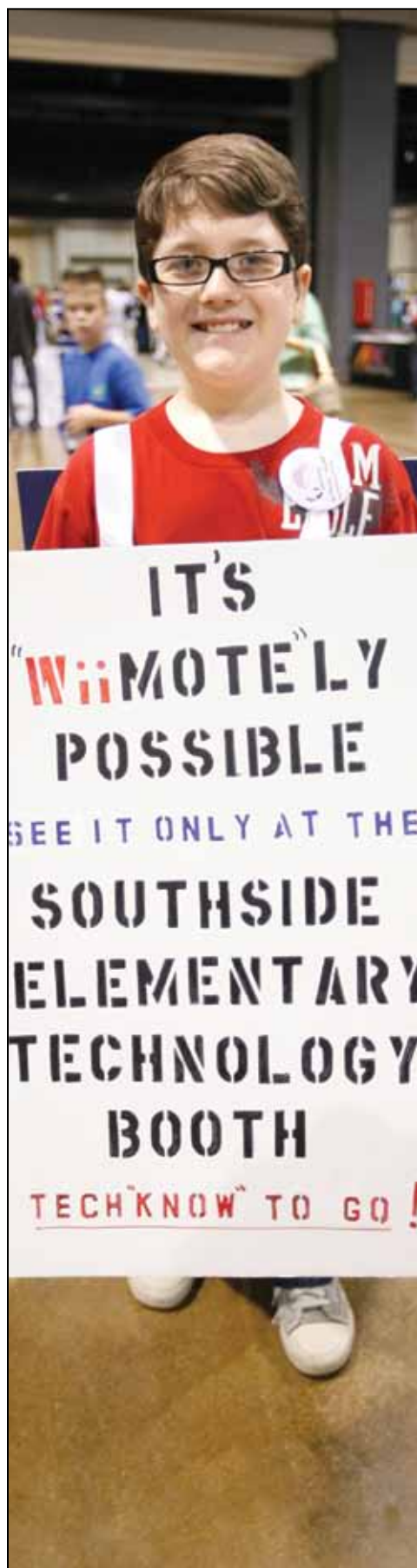
Compiled by Susan Riddell, [susan.riddell@education.ky.gov](mailto:susan.riddell@education.ky.gov)

Photo by Amy Wallot

Southside Elementary School (Pike County)

## Conferences &amp; Workshops

Important dates  
for Gifted and Talented  
teachers

These free sessions are valuable for new and experienced classroom and Gifted and Talented teachers. The first session is Aug. 29 in Bowling Green. Upcoming sessions include:

- Issues for Leaders in Gifted Education, Sept. 21 in Lexington
- Parent Night at the KAGE Fall Workshop, Sept. 21 in Lexington
- KAGE Fall Workshop 2009, Social-Emotional Needs of Gifted Students, with keynote presenter Jean Peterson, Sept. 22 in Lexington

Contact KAGE at [kage@wku.edu](mailto:kage@wku.edu) or (270) 745-4301 with questions.

## School psychologists

The annual conference of the Kentucky Association for Psychology in the Schools (KAPS) will be Sept. 9-11, at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Louisville. The theme for this year's conference is "Making Connections." A variety of state and national speakers will be addressing such topics as solution-focused grief counseling, transforming school discipline, dropout prevention, autism assessments, Response to Intervention, cognitive processing, bipolar disorder, ethical issues for school psychologists, executive functioning disorder and a host of other topics. Educators and mental health professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, school social workers and therapists are welcome. The early registration deadline is Sept. 4. For more information, contact Diane Herrick at [diane.herrick@jefferson.kyschools.us](mailto:diane.herrick@jefferson.kyschools.us) or (502) 485-6367.

[www.kapsonline.org](http://www.kapsonline.org)

Kentucky Association  
of Teachers of History

The Annual Conference of Kentucky Association of Teachers of History (KATH) will be Sept. 12 at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond. This year's theme is "Historical Thinking, Historical Literacy and Teaching in the 21st Century." The keynote address, "Uncovering the Mysteries of Historical Thinking: Using Research to Inform Classroom Practice," will be given by Dr. Daisy Martin of the Stanford History Education

Group. Contact Carolyn DuPont at [carolyn.dupont@eku.edu](mailto:carolyn.dupont@eku.edu) for more information.

[www.kyhistoryteachers.org](http://www.kyhistoryteachers.org)

## Environmental education

The Kentucky Association for Environmental Education (KAEE) is hosting its 33rd annual conference Sept. 18-19. This year the theme, "Currents in Environmental Education," is in reference to the two rivers that join in Carrollton and also to current events in the field of environmental education. More than 40 concurrent sessions will offer connections with the Kentucky Core Content and *Program of Studies*, national standards, and North American Association for Environmental Education standards. Teachers and other educators can earn professional development or continuing education credits while attending the conference. Register now for concurrent and plenary sessions, meals, exhibits and networking with peers. For more information, contact Jennifer Adler at [conference@kaee.org](mailto:conference@kaee.org) or call (859) 707-7421.

[www.KAEE.org](http://www.KAEE.org)

## KASC Annual Conference

The Kentucky Association of School Councils' annual conference is Sept. 22-23 in Louisville. Leslie Robertson will open with a pre-conference session on Sept. 21, sharing advice on combining engaging instruction and embedded formative assessment. Ken Draut of the KDE Office of Assessment and Accountability will offer assessment updates and changes, and sessions on developing model program reviews for arts, practical living and writing are scheduled. Schools that have made remarkable student achievement gains or demonstrated consistently high student learning will present. The conference theme is "Schools that Lead the Way." Both new council members and experienced council members can fulfill their training requirement at the KASC conference, and the conference is approved for EILA credit. Contact Lisa Stone at [lisa@kasc.net](mailto:lisa@kasc.net) or (859) 238-2188 for more information.

[www.kasc.net](http://www.kasc.net)

## Social studies teachers

The Kentucky Council for Social Studies (KCSS) will have its annual conference at the University Plaza Holiday Inn in Bowling Green on Sept. 23-24. KCSS is accepting program proposals. Those interested should go to [www.kcss.org/content](http://www.kcss.org/content). For more information, contact Mark Kopp at [mark.kopp@hardin.kyschools.us](mailto:mark.kopp@hardin.kyschools.us) or fax proposals to (270) 769-8907.

[www.kcss.org](http://www.kcss.org)

Kentucky Middle  
School Association

The Kentucky Middle School Association's annual conference will be Sept. 20-22. Bill McBride, the featured speaker, will conduct a pre-conference session on Sept. 20 on "Engaging the Disengaged: Energizing Adolescent Learners." On Sept. 21, he will be doing sessions on "Literacy across the Content Areas," and his keynote address will focus on teaching to gender differences.

[www.kmsaonline.com](http://www.kmsaonline.com)

## National Media Market

The 31st National Media Market will be held in Lexington Oct. 4-8 as 50 of the nation's top-quality educational media producers and distributors, including KET, will offer on-demand previews of new releases, products and services. An additional benefit this year is the participation of the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP), which will make a one-hour presentation on Oct. 5 entitled "10,000,000 Additional Students May Be Waiting To View Your Media. Interested?" DCMP will provide an overview of its mission and services, including a library of free-loan described and captioned educational media and a clearinghouse of information related to educational media access and explain how its services can benefit students. For more information, contact Ursula Schwarz at (520) 743-7735.

[www.nmm.net](http://www.nmm.net)

[www.dcmp.org](http://www.dcmp.org)

## Mathematics Day at UK

The second edition of High School Mathematics Day will be held Oct. 17 and is organized by the Department of Mathematics and the College of Engineering at the University of Kentucky. This event features a half-day of activities for high school students with an interest in mathematics. All students must pre-register in August. Teachers are welcome to join their students for all or part of the morning. Contact Russell Brown at [russell.brown@uky.edu](mailto:russell.brown@uky.edu) or (859) 257-3951 for more information.

## Mathematics teachers

The Kentucky Council of Teachers of Mathematics' annual conference will be Oct. 10 at Bourbon County High School in Paris. The early registration deadline is Sept. 18. Speaker proposal forms also are available online. For more information, contact Kari Ostby at [kari.ostby@jefferson.kyschools.us](mailto:kari.ostby@jefferson.kyschools.us) or (502) 244-1572.

[www.kctm.org](http://www.kctm.org)

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## BULLETIN BOARD (continued)

### Science teachers

The Kentucky Science Teachers Association will host a conference Nov. 5-7 in Lexington. The theme is "AIM for Success" with the strands Assessment, Integration and Modifications (AIM). Featured speaker will be education author Page Keeley. The matrix of daily sessions will be online in early August. Early bird registration at a reduced rate ends Oct. 23. For more information, contact Sherry Fox at [sffox@aol.com](mailto:sffox@aol.com) or (502) 267-5708.

[www.ksta.org](http://www.ksta.org)

### Contests & Other Events

#### KHS at the State Fair

Visit the Kentucky Historical Society (KHS) exhibit at the Kentucky State Fair Aug. 20-30 to learn about all things Kentucky and to enjoy regularly scheduled performances and presentations. Located in the south wing, the KHS exhibit highlights the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History, the Old State Capitol and the Kentucky Military History Museum. The 10,000-square-foot educational area will include an opportunity to use hands-on activities to explore lutherie — the art of making or repairing stringed instruments; a section devoted to Kentucky's military treasures; and an informative and eye-popping area showcasing examples of Kentucky decorative arts and architecture from the Federal to the Aesthetic periods.

[www.history.ky.gov](http://www.history.ky.gov)

#### Engaging mathematics students

*Academic Exchange Quarterly* announces a call for papers on K-16 mathematics education for its winter 2009 issue. The theme is "Engaging Mathematics Students as Holistic Learners." Early submissions will be accepted through August. Contact Sue Staats at [staats@umn.edu](mailto:staats@umn.edu) for more information.

[www.rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/6math.htm](http://www.rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/6math.htm)

#### Booster seat enforcement

Kentucky's new booster seat law has been in effect since last year but until now most law enforcement agencies have only issued warnings to offenders. Full enforcement with citations began July 1, and the Kentucky State Booster Seat Coalition is asking all elementary school teachers to help educate the public about this law. Kentucky's law requires children between 40 and 50 inches tall and who are younger than 7 to be

properly restrained in a child booster seat. The fine will be \$30, but a first offense can be waived if the offender shows evidence of purchasing a booster seat. For optimal protection, children should remain in a booster seat until the seat belt fits them correctly, or at approximately 4 feet, 9 inches tall and about 8 or 9 years of age. A high-backed or backless booster may be used, but with a lap and shoulder belt together. For more information about booster seats, call Therese Moseley at (859) 260-6058 or Sherri Hannan at (859) 323-1153.

### Resources

#### Perspectives now online

After 20 years, the Prichard Committee has printed the last issue of *Perspectives*. In an effort to hold down costs and take advantage of the speed and interactive possibilities of electronic media, the quarterly newsletter will soon become a more regular publication with in-depth, original reporting delivered by e-mail. Plans are to use the new electronic version of *Perspectives* to keep parents aware of trends and issues in education that will affect Kentucky schools. To submit contact information to receive *Perspectives* online, use the links on the "Contact Us" page at [www.prichardcommittee.org](http://www.prichardcommittee.org). Those interested also can mail contact information to Prichard Committee, c/o Cindy Heine, P.O. Box 1658, Lexington, KY 40588-1658 or send it by fax to (859) 233-0760.

#### Calculation Nation

Calculation Nation uses the power of the Web to let students challenge opponents from anywhere in the world. At the same time, students are able to challenge themselves by investigating significant mathematical content and practicing fundamental skills. Calculation Nation is part of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Illuminations project, which offers standards-based resources that improve the teaching and learning of mathematics for all students. Its materials shed light on the vision for school mathematics set forth in NCTM's *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* and *Curriculum Focal Points*. NCTM is a public voice of mathematics education, providing vision, leadership and professional development to support teachers in ensuring equitable mathematics learning of the highest quality for all students.

<http://calculationnation.nctm.org>

<http://www.nctm.org>

<http://illuminations.nctm.org>



Photo by Amy Wallot

### Chocolate-covered economics

Educators listen to chef Junior Carroll talk about making candy during "Chocolate Economics" at the Ruth Hunt Candy Company in Mt. Sterling on June 8. During the professional development opportunity, teachers learned economic lesson plans for the elementary grade levels and used chocolate to talk about topics such as trade and supply and demand. The day ended with a tour of the company's factory. The workshop was sponsored by the Eastern Kentucky University Center for Economic Education in cooperation with the Kentucky Council on Economic Development.

## Strong from page 11

underestimate the need for structure in the environment, according to Burkhardt. She also warns against teachers using a sarcastic tone with students.

"Even if you build relationships with students, there is no place for sarcasm," Burkhardt said. "It destroys trust in you and diminishes students' willingness to fully engage in the classroom."

Anderson-Morton added that a weak learning climate also has an impact on student interaction with each other. One way to combat this is to offer them a say in what goes on in the classroom while still being able to maintain control and foster quality learning.

"I establish a sense of community and caring with my students by allowing them choice in the classroom as much as possible," Anderson-Morton said. "We vote on various aspects of how we, as a community of learners, are going to handle various situations and issues that come up in the classroom. We discuss and establish our own expectations for behavior in our classroom. If someone does not live up to those expectations, then we, as a community of learners, decide consequences. We work together

to come to a class consensus as to what should or should not be done. I have found the students to be harder on themselves than we are.

"There are some non-negotiables that I have to implement," she added, "but there are also some things that students are able to negotiate as well. This helps to take me out of an authority role on occasion, and it helps students become more responsible in settling their own disputes in rational ways."

Teachers can easily see when a great learning climate has been established, according to Burkhardt. Walking into a classroom, it's when "you get that feeling that this is a great place to learn," she said.

#### MORE INFO...

[www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=HQI](http://www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=HQI)

Deborah Anderson-Morton, [deborah.morton@jefferson.kyschools.us](mailto:deborah.morton@jefferson.kyschools.us), (502) 485-8233

Susanne Burkhardt, [susanne.burkhardt@shelby.kyschools.us](mailto:susanne.burkhardt@shelby.kyschools.us), (502) 633-4460

Donna Lynch, [donna.lynch@education.ky.gov](mailto:donna.lynch@education.ky.gov)



# Student information system provides 'Infinite' resources

By Matthew Tungate

matthew.tungate@education.ky.gov

Deidra Evans, a biology teacher at Bell County High School, was not very happy about having to learn to use the Kentucky Student Information System, often called Infinite Campus for the Minnesota-based company that implemented it, after 25 years in education.

"However, once I became acquainted with Infinite Campus I absolutely love the additional features the software allows us to utilize," she said. "Have I had a few moments when I thought, 'Oh my goodness what have they done to us?' Of course, but all in all it has been a positive change for me as a classroom teacher, and I wouldn't want to go back."

As of March 26, all 174 districts, Kentucky School for the Blind, Kentucky School for the Deaf and 55 vocational and technical centers were live on Infinite Campus, Deputy Commissioner Larry Stinson told the state Board of Education in April.

Infinite Campus provides a Web-based system that allows authorized users to access grade books, lesson plans, Individual Education Plans, a parent portal and more from almost any workstation with Internet access. Data is managed through a centralized database, providing real-time, multi-year information to those who are authorized to view it. When an authorized user enters data into the system, other authorized users can view the changed data immediately.

Stinson warned the board that Infinite Campus has many components and will likely take individual districts "a full year" before becoming adept at using it.

"They may not all take advantage or put all of those components into use," he said.

Kay Kennedy, director of the Division of District Operations and Pupil Transportation, told the board that Infinite Campus did a great deal of localization to meet the state's requirements.

"All that work, we feel, is part of what we call a support system to every student in Kentucky," she said.

For instance, teachers may use the system to input grades, and they have the flexibility to decide how those grades are used, such as by points or percentages. Teachers also may make notes to themselves about lesson plans and include electronic files, she said. Those lesson plans can be copied forward to future school years, Ken-

nedy said, which should save teachers time.

Another way that teachers can use Infinite Campus, she said, is to take real-time, minute-by-minute attendance. However, some districts are not allowing teachers to update attendance from the classroom, Kennedy said.

"As we get more familiar with this system, they will put that back in the hands of the teachers," she said.

Teachers can set up automated messages to parents and alert parents if their children are missing assignments, Kennedy said. In the same way, districts and schools may send messages to teachers via Infinite Campus.

Teachers also may see basic student information — such as enrollment information, previous years' enrollment, schedule, attendance and other grades — about students in their classes, as long as the district gives teachers those privileges, Kennedy said.

Paducah Independent school district implemented Infinite Campus in July 2008, and Alan Tucker, a 15-year teaching veteran at Paducah Tilghman High School, said he used the grade book, lesson planner, roster, sub-roster, attendance, behavior, search/student and all the tabs about a student, "and many more I cannot think of or remember right now."

"I am still finding some today," he said.

Teachers who are new to Infinite Campus shouldn't be afraid to ask others for help and to experiment. "Don't be afraid to punch buttons," he said. "We found most of the neat stuff by just doing that."

Evans said she liked being able to see students' grades in all classes along with their attendance.

"I can encourage students to work harder in another class because I see their grades are slipping," she said.

Evans said teachers new to Infinite Campus will find it "is not a monster" and they will learn to appreciate it. "Just take



Photo by Amy Wallot

Alan Tucker, a physics teacher at Paducah Tilghman High School (Paducah Independent), is still finding new features on Infinite Campus and recommends teachers play around with the program to find which ones will help them the most.

baby steps and find a good tip sheet to keep handy," she said.

Districts also may give parents privileges to look at some student data. Kennedy said she expected to exceed the 77 districts that had given parents access to the student information system by the time school starts this month.

"From the perspective of a parent, I will have real-time access to the information about my child that I can follow up on," she said.

Infinite Campus is capable of providing parents information about:

- schedules
- grades
- homework
- attendance
- immunization schedules
- required credits
- fees

"It's a very powerful tool to encourage students to stay on top of their work," Kennedy said. "It also brings a lot of pressure to teachers because parents expect to see a turnaround when work is handed in."

The pressure comes from students and parents, she said.

"What we're trying to do with this particular product is put in the hands of parents a communication tool that allows the school and the district to provide real-time information in the categories that particular district

chooses to make available," Kennedy said.

Evans said she has always updated her grades within two days of an assessment, so she did not make major changes. "But I do know other teachers who have had to start posting grades and becoming more organized simply due to the parent portal, so that is a good thing," she said.

Troy Brock, director of pupil personnel in Paducah Independent, said parents in his district have loved the parent portal.

"They like being able to log on anytime and anywhere and see how their child is performing in class, how they are doing behaviorally

and what assignments their child has to prepare for in the near future," he said. "One parent noted that she felt more 'in touch' with the school and the teachers."

"This window into the classroom has helped teachers communicate more frequently and clearly with parents about their children's achievement and needs. Next year, we plan to integrate the communication features into an all-call system and again take another leap toward bridging the gap between school and home."

Pam Greene, director of pupil personnel in the Bell County school district, said parents in her district love the parent portal as well.

"Several parents have called me at work, e-mailed or stopped me at a local store to comment on how they are so glad they can view their children's grades and attendance via the parent portal," she said. "The access encourages and allows communication between the school and parent."

Administrators also have access to reports, documents and contacts, Kennedy said. Infinite Campus allows districts to transfer data to each other when students move.

"All that work is part of what we call a support system to every student in Kentucky," Kennedy said.

## MORE INFO...

[www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=SIS](http://www.education.ky.gov/JumpTo/?jump=SIS)

Deidra Evans, [deidra.evans@bell.kyschools.us](mailto:deidra.evans@bell.kyschools.us), (606) 337-7061

Alan Tucker, [alan.tucker@paducah.kyschools.us](mailto:alan.tucker@paducah.kyschools.us), (270) 444-5650

*"Don't be afraid to punch buttons. We found most of the neat stuff by just doing that."*

Alan Tucker, Paducah Tilghman High School (Paducah Independent)